

Lesson 2 Plot

The series of events that make up a story is called the **plot**. The plot is “what happens” in the story and often centers on a conflict that a character faces. A **conflict** is a struggle between two or more opposing forces. The plot of a story also includes a **resolution** which shows how the conflict is resolved, or cleared up.

Tips for Success

- Pay attention to how each story event leads to the next event.
- Look for the main conflict a character faces.
- Focus on how the conflict is resolved.

Think about the conflict that Whirlwind, a Sioux grandmother, faces in this excerpt from *Buffalo Woman* by Dorothy Johnson.

Her back was toward the baby when she heard him shriek with glee. She turned instantly—and saw a dreadful thing. Between her and the baby was another kind of baby, an awkward little bear cub, the cub of the frightfully dangerous grizzly bear. The cub itself was harmless, but the old-woman bear, its mother, must be near, and she would protect her child.

Whirlwind did not even think of danger to herself. She ran to save her cub. She snatched up the baby on his cradleboard and threw him, with all her strength, above her head toward the level top of the cutbank.

At that moment the old-woman bear appeared. She snarled and came running, a shambling, awkward-looking run but very fast.

Whirlwind saw with horror the cradleboard with its precious burden sliding back down the cutbank. She had been too close when she threw the baby upward. The baby was screaming. Grandmother Whirlwind ran, picked up the cradleboard, ran back a few steps, and then threw hard again. This time the bundle stayed up there.

Whirlwind ran again toward the cutbank and climbed as fast as she could, digging into the dirt frantically with clutching fingers and digging toes.

1. What is Whirlwind's main conflict in the story?
 - A. She and her grandchild may be attacked by a grizzly bear.
 - B. She can't decide whether to save herself or her grandchild.
 - C. She can't throw the baby up onto the cutbank to safety.
 - D. She doesn't want the grizzly bear to see her.

1. ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

Mark your answer choice by filling in the oval.



Now check to see whether you chose the correct answer.

- A. This is the correct answer. Whirlwind and her grandchild are under attack.
- B. Whirlwind doesn't think twice about trying to save the baby first.
- C. On her second attempt, she does get the baby up onto the cutbank.
- D. The grizzly bear has already seen her and is rushing toward them.

Test Practice

This passage is about Shoots, Grandmother Whirlwind's young grandson. As you continue to read from *Buffalo Woman*, think about the main character's conflict and how it is resolved.

He saw a bundle fly through the air and slide down the cutbank. It happened too fast for him to see that it was the cradleboard with his baby brother. He heard fast movement in the weeds as Whirlwind ran back and threw the cradleboard again. He stood up, mouth open, just as she scrambled up the bank. With horror he saw the old-woman bear's claws rake her struggling legs.

With his heart in his mouth he did the best thing he could think of. He dropped his bow and grabbed the cub with both hands, so that it squalled with fear and pain. Then he threw it hard—past its mother.

Hearing her child cry, the woman bear whirled away from the cutbank to protect her cub. Shoots snatched up his bow; it was a good one, as strong as he could pull, and in a quiver on his

shoulder he had six hunting arrows tipped with sharpened iron. At his waist he had a good steel knife.

But his enemy was better armed, with twenty immensely long, curved, sharp, death-dealing claws and a mouthful of long, sharp teeth, and she weighed more than five times as much as he did . . .

He stood his ground and fired his arrows at her, fast but very carefully. . . . The woman bear yelled in pain and fury. She batted at the arrows deep in her flesh. She bit at them. But she kept coming.

Then Shoots did the last thing he could do, because it was too late to run. While the grizzly fought at the arrows, especially one that had gone into her left eye, he leaped on her back. With all his strength he sank his good steel knife into her throat . . .

1. (A) (B) (C) (D)
2. (A) (B) (C) (D)
3. (A) (B) (C) (D)
4. (A) (B) (C) (D)

Mark the best answer for questions 1–4.

1. The first conflict that Shoots faces occurs when the grizzly bear
A. claws his legs.
B. attacks his baby brother.
C. attacks Whirlwind.
D. charges him.
2. To resolve this first conflict, Shoots
A. clambers up onto the cutbank.
B. throws the cub to distract its mother.
C. runs to the village for help.
D. shoots the bear in the eye.
3. Shoots does not run when the bear keeps charging him because
A. he does not want to appear cowardly.
B. he wants to give Whirlwind more time to escape.
C. he has six hunting arrows.
D. there is no time to run.
4. The word *rake* in the first paragraph means
A. to gather or loosen with a tool.
B. to search thoroughly.
C. to glance over rapidly.
D. to cut or scratch.